



Isabel Nolan *Dreamshook*

Pavilion of Ireland at the 61st
International Art Exhibition
— LA BIENNALE DI VENEZIA

9 MAY
— 22 NOVEMBER
2026



Isabel Nolan, *Dreamshook*, 2026. Installation view at the Pavilion of Ireland at the 61st International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, 2026. Photo: Mark Blower. Courtesy of the artist and Kerlin Gallery, Dublin.

Culture Ireland and The Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon present Isabel Nolan's commission for the Irish Pavilion, entitled *Dreamshook*.

The word *Dreamshook*¹ describes the feeling of waking from a dream, when reality is destabilised and realms of possibility linger and dissipate. Nolan's exhibition of hand-tufted tapestry, drawing, and sculpture, represents thresholds, dream states and narratives that strain the distinctions between the immaterial and the actual. The work develops from her sustained fascination with the human desire to find meaning or order in the universe, and the frameworks that shape our understanding of the world.

Nolan looks to the Middle Ages and early Renaissance as an era that resonates with now. It was a turbulent period marked by religious and political upheaval, a time transformed by plague, wars and famine. Cultural and technological developments in Europe cultivated profound ideological change, challenged the nature of authority, and reshaped what it

1. The word "dreamshook" was coined by Nolan in 2017.



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might mean to be human. The work draws on artefacts and ideas from those formative times that helped pattern the present-day: from the emergence of humanism, dramatic developments in Italian painting and architecture; to the invention of the printing press and the use of moveable type in Europe.

She focuses on the figure of Aldo Manuzio (c.1450–1515), an innovative, influential printer and publisher based in Venice. As the century turned, Manuzio, widely known as Aldus Manutius, transformed the culture of reading in small and large ways: introducing the semi-colon and italics; and more significantly producing numerous, portable *enchiridons* (pocket-sized books), beautifully designed with wide margins and modern typography. In his promotion of key writings by influential contemporary humanists and numerous Greek and Roman classical works — newly, conscientiously edited and never before published in Europe — he hoped to champion the idea of human perfectibility and foster a more ‘civilised’ world.

At the centre of the exhibition is a pair of large-scale arched tapestries featuring apparitions. In *Aldus Dreams of a Plentiful Supply of Good Books* (2026), Nolan imagines Aldus’ dream with numerous nods to the art and architecture of the early Renaissance. Nearby, *Dreamshook* (2026) stages an unyielding bed adrift on an unstable floor; a loose constellation of abstract forms. It is accompanied by *Oh!* (2026), a curtain that seems paradoxically still and in motion. A cluster of drawings capture fragments of thought—quotes, annotations, and speculative reflections on dreams and readers across time. Moving fluidly between the intimate and the expansive, the tangible and the imagined, the exhibition invites viewers into a space where dreams press insistently on reality—shaping it, unsettling it, and revealing its hidden contours.

From Manuzio’s ambitions to publish “a plentiful supply of books”, to moments of hope and transformation, Nolan invokes these histories to signal how the architectures of belief and knowledge we inhabit often stretch the limits of credibility. Drawing on literature, history, religion, and mythology, the works ground far-reaching subjects in intimate, material encounters, exploring how meaning and connection are forged in the turmoil of the present day. *Dreamshook* invites speculation on how the dynamics of wonder, belief and power shape both expectations and human experience, and how we encounter the world in all its messiness and debatable beauty.

Isabel Nolan said: “Even if there is much to be appreciated about it, it can be tricky to love a European heritage. It’s a place that wielded privilege as a weapon and progressively built wealth and culture through extraction and subjugation; a lesson quickly learnt growing up in Ireland. But there is much within the cultural history of post-medieval Europe, albeit produced and shaped almost exclusively by and for a wealthy, white, Christian patriarchal society, that I still love and learn from.

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La Biennale di Venezia

61. Esposizione
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There's a Goya aquatint called *The sleep of reason produces monsters*. While reading into the history of humanism, which birthed generous ideas and a remarkable legacy, I recalled his work, mindful that the dreams and desires of reason also produced horrors.

Dreamshook might be a show about ambivalence, about the literature and art of western Judaeo-Christian, Classically inflected, enlightened society that I both hate and love. What it means and what it entails to be human, or even humane, is being tested. It feels timely to look at a period when some of what we have taken for granted about being 'modern' humans for 600 plus years is subject to new pressures and potentially revolutionary change."

Dreamshook is a dazzling new body of work that invites visitors into a materialised dream state where hierarchies and expectation collapse. Unfolding from Manuzio's dream inviting us to pick up books rather than arms, the work weaves moments of hope and societal change amidst crisis; histories that resonate strongly with our own time. In her singular practice with vibrant colour and texture, Nolan prompts us to find some hope in the face of indifference, and to seek connection in this complex world we've made.



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Image credit: Isabel Nolan, *Dreamshook*, 2026. Installation view at the Pavilion of Ireland at the 61st International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, 2026.
Photo: Mark Blower. Courtesy of the artist and Kerlin Gallery, Dublin.

Commissioner: Culture Ireland

Curator: Georgina Jackson with The Douglas Hyde Gallery of Contemporary Art

Producer: Cian O'Brien

Assistant Curator: Niamh Darling

Co-ordinator: Rachel McIntyre

Installation Team: Bernard Smyth, Edward Cunniffe,
Sara Murphy and Frank Prendergast.

Tapestry Production: Manufacture de Tapis de Bourgogne

Sculpture Production: Space Forms

Designer: Stina Sandström

Communications: Aileen Galvin and Enya McIntyre
from Sync and Swim; Sam Talbot, Isabel Davies
and Gwyneth Tambe-Green from Sam Talbot PR.

Venice Co-ordinator: Diego Carpentiero

Venice Events Co-ordinator: Alice Tibaldi Chiesa

Opening Party Producers: SoSimpatico

Ireland at Venice is an initiative of Culture Ireland in partnership with the Arts Council. With Lead Partner Trinity College Dublin and Principal Partner Dublin City Council for Ireland at Venice 2026.

Proudly supported by Headline Partner Clinch Wealth Management and Partner IPUT Real Estate Dublin.

With the support of: Kerlin Gallery, Dublin; Tia Collection; The Embassy of Ireland, Italy; Stoney Road Press; Manufacture de Tapis de Bourgogne; Select Aperitivo; and Diageo Italia S.p.A.

Educational partners for the Ireland at Venice Mediator Programme: Burren College of Art; Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Dún Laoghaire; Limerick School of Art and Design, TUS; MTU Crawford College of Art & Design, Cork; National College of Art & Design, Dublin; The Department of History of Art and Architecture at Trinity College Dublin, University of Dublin; and the School of Art History and Cultural Policy at University College Dublin.



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BIOGRAPHIES

Artist **Isabel Nolan**'s exhibitions are rooted in big subjects: cosmology and deep history; religion and mythology; mortality and love. Working across sculpture, textiles, paintings, drawings, photography and writing, Nolan responds to the fundamental question of how humans bring the world into meaning. Looking at the history of aesthetics, theology, technology, and ideas, Nolan examines how we frame and make our lived experience. Whether inspired by the knees of a 17th century sculpture, the status of a Neolithic artefact, or a solar storm in the 19th century, she looks for ways to like, or even love, the difficult and complex human world we've made. Born in Dublin, Nolan studied at the National College of Art & Design, and has had significant solo exhibitions in Ireland and internationally in spaces including: Château La Coste, Aix-en-Provence, France; London Mithraeum Bloomberg SPACE, London; Grazer Kunstverein, Graz; Mercer Union, Toronto and Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver; Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; and Musée d'art moderne de Saint Etienne. Her work has been exhibited at Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Artspace, Sydney; Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh; Daejeon Museum of Art, South Korea; and Beijing Art Museum of the Imperial City, Beijing. She has participated in biennales including Lofoten International Arts Festival, Glasgow International, EVA International, Limerick, and in 2025 she was a commissioned artist for the 13th Liverpool Biennial, curated by Marie-Anne McQuay. In 2026 Nolan will have a comprehensive solo exhibition at Southwark Park Galleries, London, travelling to Bluecoat, Liverpool, in 2027. She lives in Dublin, and works in Temple Bar Gallery + Studios. Isabel is represented by the Kerlin Gallery, Dublin, and Sikkema Malloy Jenkins, New York.

Dr Georgina Jackson is the Director of The Douglas Hyde Gallery of Contemporary Art at Trinity College Dublin, where she has commissioned new work by artists including Abbas Akhavan, Bassam Issa Al-Sabah, Atsushi Kaga, Jumana Manna and Deirdre O'Mahony. Previously, she served as Director of Exhibitions at Mercer Union in Toronto, where she curated and commissioned significant new projects by artists such as Jason Dodge, Deanna Bowen, Carlos Motta and Duane Linklater. Her work is shaped by a commitment to supporting groundbreaking artistic practices and fostering dialogue between artists, audiences and institutions. Jackson has also been a Curator-in-Residence at Pittsburgh's Mattress Factory-Contemporary Art Museum and has collaborated on exhibitions with major cultural organisations including Tate Liverpool, the Contemporary Art Gallery in Vancouver, and the Toronto International Film Festival. Alongside her curatorial practice, she has taught at the University of Toronto, IADT and the National College of Art & Design, Dublin. From 2018 to 2022 she served on the Steering Committee of the National Campaign for the Arts, contributing to advocacy efforts for the cultural sector in Ireland.

The Douglas Hyde is a leading platform for contemporary art in Ireland, bringing the best of international contemporary art to Ireland and the best of Irish contemporary art to the world. Located in the heart of Dublin city, it was founded in 1978 by Trinity College Dublin and the Arts Council of Ireland, making history as Ireland's first public gallery dedicated to contemporary art and first university gallery. The Douglas Hyde commissions emerging and established Irish and international artists, presenting these new artworks in the gallery and beyond its walls to produce extraordinary and inspiring experiences. It supports artists to make bold new work and cares deeply about bringing that work to a diverse and expanding audience. For over 48 years it has shaped generations of artists and audiences. For further information see: thedouglashyde.ie



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Cian O'Brien is the Director of COBA: Cian O'Brien Arts, a production house and touring company that supports the production of large-scale cultural projects and cooperations and works strategically with cultural organisations on policy, recruitment, strategy and communications. COBA has a track record of working with notable artists on new works across theatre, dance and the visual arts, including Eoghan + Lauren, Fearghus Ó Conchúir, Gerard Byrne and Annabelle Comyn's HATCH Theatre Company. Prior to founding COBA, O'Brien led Ireland's first arts centre, Project Arts Centre from 2011 to 2024, as was Artistic Director through a number of large-scale cultural projects including Ireland at Venice (2017 & 2024) and The Casement Project (ART: 2016) and 14-18 NOW. In 2023, he was appointed by the Dept of Foreign Affairs & Trade to the Strategy Committee of the Centre Culturel Irlandais, Paris. From 2016 to 2022 he served as Deputy Chair on the Steering Committee of the National Campaign for the Arts, contributing to advocacy efforts for the cultural sector in Ireland.

Ireland at Venice is selected via an open call issued biennially by Culture Ireland in partnership with The Arts Council to invite expressions of interest for the appointment of the Curator and Artist of Ireland's National representation at Venice. The selection of the team to represent Ireland is made following an open, competitive process with international jury members.

Since 2005, national representation at La Biennale di Venezia has been a Government initiative led by **Culture Ireland** in partnership with The Arts Council. Both partners consider **La Biennale di Venezia** to be a remarkable opportunity for artists' development and for Irish curators to work in an international context.

Isabel Nolan's *Dreamshook* will be presented at The Douglas Hyde Gallery of Contemporary Art, Dublin; Regional Cultural Centre, Letterkenny; and Ormston House, Limerick, in 2027, as part of the Ireland at Venice's national tour, generously supported by the Arts Council of Ireland as part of its commitment to promote the visual arts to audiences in Ireland.

The Arts Council is excited to be in a position to continue to support the Irish presentation of the Ireland at Venice National Tour, as part of a commitment to the ten-year strategy: 'Making Great Art Work' and specifically, promoting visual arts to Irish audiences.